The Five Romances of Two Sisters

Mrs. Brinsley Fitzgerald, Formerly Mrs. Anthony J. Drexel.

Extraordinary Social Triumph of Baltimore's Beautiful Armstrong Girls, and Their Successive Adventures in Matrimony.

By Barbara Craydon

THERE are no stranger stories in the court and social fiction of the master writers of French literature than the Five Loves of the Two Armstrong Sisters. How two Baltimore belles, with beauty and charm as their sole assets, set siege to the most exclusive and unapproachable castles of the Money God and the Social God, and, each single-handed, stormed both, makes up one of the most remarkable narratives from real life that has ever come before the people of the Old and the New World. By way of incident, the Far East has some small part in the romantic heart adventures of the pair.

For the flags of America, England, France, Portugal and Japan must be hung over the verbal gallery of this heart story to mark the scenes in which the two women have appeared on the world's social stage, amid settings that only a Croesus might buy and a King command.

The Quiet First Chapter

By way of beginning, the two sisters had small prospects during their girlhood days of shining in the court firmaments that now hold them. In the venerable and sophisticated city of Baltimore, where the terrapin is famous and the food products of the Big Bay are held both in anticipation and remembrance by visitors, there came up Anne Armstrong and her sister, Margarita. They were bred to the self-contained atmosphere of the old city that clings to the edge of the South, while holding one municipal arm about the neck of the North.

If a master of the stage like Belasco were called upon to set the first act of their lives he would place it almost on colonial lines and a charming home atmosphere. But he would have been at a loss to find the action needed to get the first act over the footlights. First-nighters would have gone to sleep and wondered why the author did not begin his play in the second act.

In the second act the most blase occupant of a regular first night seat would have shaken off the ennui spirit and picked up the thread of the play, for it bounded from the home commonplace to the scintillating light of Society with the suddenness of a battle plane, rising to meet an enemy attack, and its second setting was no more like the first than the stable-like dulness of the hangar is like the rarified atmosphere of the fighting altitude. And in action the change is as great as the mise en scene. It is a transition from gathering roses from the climbing vines in the afternoon to the dizzy whirl of a gold-spurred establishment.

The Drexel Romance

It was into such an establishment that Margarita Armstrong came when she met and won Anthony J. Drexel, heir by right to the banking prowess and social place of the famous Philadelphia family. He had $300,000 a year to shake at any wolf that might, perchance, array itself in a dress suit and slip by the butler.

"She has stormed the exclusive Philadelphia set," said the social writers when the news of the marriage came.

For some years she made her way in the Quaker city, acquiring the sure poise and the art of playing the game of Society. Then, before anybody knew it, she had moved her pawns and castles, her bishops and her kings over the water to the British court. People smiled at her audacity. Edward VII. was then the Prince of Wales, wondering if the name of King would ever be his, and the elegant arbiter of things social in the British world.

There came a day when the Prince of Wales met the American woman and, like others who had fallen under that spell, the man who had conquered many women capitulated before one. Society heard that Windsor Castle had placed upon its dinner list the names of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony J. Drexel.

Mrs. Drexel's daughter, Margarita, known to her intimates as "Daisy," had reached the age when Society hangs her buds upon the tree of knowledge of the good and evil of the social chase. A coming out party was arranged. For it the mother rented a castle for which she paid $25,000 for a single week. Thus came little "Daisy" into the social orchard from which, later, and with much ceremony, Lord Maidstone plucked her for his own. And Maidstone, learning more than love in the wooing, acquired a knack of London Stock Exchange work that did not leave the young woman with a drone.

Mr. and Mrs. Jean H. E. St. Cyr, Photographed on Their Honeymoon.

In the meantime, "Tony" Drexel had been looking around a trifle. Fate had not made him to hang helplessly under the hind wheels of any social chariot, and while his wife conquered courts he courted pleasure. Paris was agreeable to him for more reasons than one, some of which were subsequently named in his wife's divorce suit.

At first there came a separation, with $50,000 a year for the wife. Then followed the real divorce. It had hardly been forgotten in the day's news when there came in January the news that Mrs. Drexel had married Lt.-Col. Brinsley FitzGerald, private secretary to the commander-in-chief of the Home Forces. The officer was Mrs. Drexel's junior by many years, but the Armstrong charm does not fade with the years, and that fact constitutes the most unusual feature of the careers of the two sisters.

Anthony J. Drexel. W. Rhinelander Stewart.

While the one sister was winning her way through court and drawing room, Anne, the other, met and married William Rhinelander Stewart, holder of one of the oldest names in New York society, and a fortune that ranked along with the big estates. Society was rather surprised when, in August, 1906, she received at Sioux Falls, S. D., a divorce from the New Yorker, and wondered what would come next.

At the time there lived in New York James Henry Smith, one of the strangest characters of the financial and social world, who was known as the wealthiest bachelor on the carpet, and who had, by his combination-safe reticence, acquired the nickname of "Silent" Smith. A bit of information had about as much chance of escaping from his lips as a newly-made millionaire has of escaping the income tax collector. Imagine, therefore, the surprise of society when it learned that the Sphinx had really spoken, and that the utterance was a proposal to Mrs. William Rhinelander Stewart.

"Silent" Smith had something like $50,000,000 that had not been decreased by any spendthrift hand. With his bride, he sought joy in the blossom-laden land of Japan, along the flower-bedecked Hawaiian lanes and then back over the court paths of Europe. A daughter belonged also to the Rhinelander Stewart name, and the mother, seeking to find in court circles a mate that would outshine her sister's son-in-law, made a match with the young Prince Miguel of Braganza, pretender to the overturned throne of Portugal.

In the course of events "Silent" Smith was taken to the perfect rest that awaits millionaires in common with mortals who know less of this world's goods. His widow, left with unlimited means, was free to choose another mate. Youth this time held her fancy, and it was a young man who came to win and to take his place at her social side. Indian Summer, won by June, never presented a stranger aspect.

There had suddenly appeared in the New York firmament a young man who gave the name of Jean H. E. St. Cyr. He wore his clothes well, danced well, and Society did not make any diligent inquiry concerning any other unessential details. He found among those present in the list of notables Mrs. Caroline Peck Redfield, who was born Peck at Farmington, Ct., some 35 years before young Mr. St. Cyr learned to lisp his first infant words. She had married Henry Alexander Redfield, a Hartford banker, who, dying, consigned to her care an estate of ample proportions.

Mrs. Redfield's first marriage had taken place in 1862, just about the time when the North had caught its breath after Bull Run, and was taking a fresh start for the race that ended at Appomattox. In 1899 she married young St. Cyr, and after six years, Mrs. St. Cyr died at the age of 74.

A Third Marriage

And shortly after that time the tidings arrived that the widow of "Silent" Smith had succeeded to the affections of the youth, duly sanctioned by the law and the church. The marriage had not ceased to be a matter of gossip when some busy person started the story that St. Cyr was really John Henry Thompson, who had started life as a newsboy and a hotel clerk in Waco, Tex. As the stories ran, he trekked North to Rochester 15 years before his marriage, and came thence to an Eighth avenue tenement in New York to launch a campaign for whatever things Fortune might hold in store for him.

The papers published the story with unusual zest. It sizzled as a sensation for a month, the St. Cyrs went into retirement as if to tell the public that it was no business of outsiders, and then the public turned to something else, quite content to let Mr. St. Cyr be known by whatever patronymic might best suit him and to seek refreshing thrills in some other direction.

And this is the story of the Five Loves of the Two Armstrong Sisters, which might be told in novel form, through many, many pages, without losing interest to the end of the final chapter. Throughout the whole story, the sisters never lost for a minute the charm that brought them first from Baltimore to the world of money and of social conquest.

Ponce de Leon, seeking the fountain of youth, might well have stopped at Baltimore on his way to the far southern realm that has carried its name in fiction as they have carried youth in fact.

Newspaper Feature Service, 1918.

Russia's "Pittsburgh Dipped in Asia"

RUSSIA is as diverse in its character as in its politics. A good illustration of this is Baku, where the great oil fields are situated. Its flaming, belching oil wells and its many millionaires give it the character of "a Pittsburgh dipped in Asia," as it is called according to H. G. Dwight in "Persian Miniatures."

Baku began to bustle about 30 years ago, before which it was a mere village of Tartars, Persians, etc. One day a Russian officer bought some land for a farm, but he soon found that nothing would grow on it. A disgusting black liquid oozed out of the earth wherever he ploughed. An Armenian to whom he offered the farm for a small sum suspected that the black liquid might be valuable, and the sale was made. The ooze was oil. The Armenian became a millionaire.

The Tartars and Persians who owned most of the rest of Baku were suspicious when other people tried to buy their property. For a long time they would not sell, but in the end they became millionaires, too.

"They couldn't help themselves. And that is why Baku is so amusing. The Russian and Armenian millionaires go away, like the millionaires of Pittsburgh. The Tartar and the Persian millionaires don't, having no idea what on earth to do with their money." So they drive around Baku in luxurious automobiles, strangely colored, gilded, jewelled, weird looking people, with beards that as often as not are dyed scarlet with henna, and remarkable headdresses that savor of musical comedy. Their other diversion is the movies, which have penetrated even into Baku.